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ABSTRACT

The last decade of educational accountability has not ushered in a millennium of professional optimism or achievement. The negative outcomes have been professional defensiveness and apathy toward systemwide efforts to make the schools more businesslike. Positive outcomes are an understanding of the professional self-discipline required in an organizational setting and a desire to enter into educational collaboration with our constituencies. The case has been made for school board accountability that capitalizes on these two gains. First, the school board is accountable for the selection and evaluation of the superintendent on the individual's demonstrated competencies. Secondly, the school board is accountable for reviewing the superintendent in efforts to collaborate with external publics on matters of educational and instructional improvements. There are specific behaviors and acts that can be documented and discovered in the search for the school executive and in the periodic review of that individual. (Author/MLF)

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DIRECTIONS FOR SCHOOL BOARD ACCOUNTABILITY--THE SELECTION AND REVIEW OF THE SCHOOL EXECUTIVE

A General Framework for Accountability

I have written extensively about teacher and administrator accountability, and I am now pleased to speak on another side of the issue--School Board accountability. It is really the same side of the issue because all of us in public education must have the same goal--the improvement of educational opportunities for all students. That is a general and lofty goal; but unless all parties in the educational enterprise periodically remind themselves of the goal, we will continue to direct our efforts in diverse ways, overemphasize the accountability of others, and force the deterioration of public education.

So while I talk of School Board accountability today, I have in the past used the same themes with a different message to teachers and administrators. Before I state specifically my ideas on School Board accountability, I would like to describe the general framework for accountability in education.

During the last decade, a large body of professional knowledge and substantial public discussion has focused on educational accountability. In 1974, a researcher determined that over 4,000 articles and manuscripts had been generated on the accountability topic. Models of accountability and expert knowledge and opinion have been produced and urged upon educators as necessary approaches to professional development and public service. Accountability advocates have required professionals to be more business-like; demanded minimal levels of success among public servants; recommended planning and evaluation techniques; and introduced performance objectives at all levels of the educational organization. I must confess that I have collaborated in this massive scrutiny of public education and contributed the following definition of accountability:[1]

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[1]Billie DeMont and Roger A. DeMont, Accountability: An Action Model for the Public Schools (Palm Springs: ETC Publications, Inc., 1975).

Accountability is a set of organizational policies and procedures which:

1. Identify the individual with authority and responsibility for specific educational programs;
2. Provide for the internal review of educational programs by those who have authority and responsibility;
3. Provide for the external review of educational programs by independent auditors;
4. Ensure the introduction of policies and practices based on the internal and external reviews.

Thus, as accountability was articulated, it consisted of a series of organizational checks over the behavior of professionals. Accountability focused on organizational power--the control of performance so that a well defined product would emerge. One thing that accountability emphasized was that the profession, for all its contributions, has devoted substantial energies to non-educational concerns. School critics alleged that the organization had become consumed by peripheral matters such as economic values, career advancement, and other professional reward systems that are adopted by our bureaucracies. Although it is difficult to deny that these concerns have a place, evidence suggested that educators had violated the boundaries of good reason and public tolerance in pursuing those interests. Schools of education, and especially teacher education programs, have been blamed for instructional failures; administrators have received their share of criticism; and Boards of Education have hardly been immune to this public outcry. But the profession became defensive about accountability and it was not a successful stimulant to professional growth and public service. As is often the case in social prescription, the outcomes of adopting the tenets of accountability were influenced by many factors which were not considered in the theories. The control theory of accountability was "out of control" in practice. A notable example of these consequences is the Detroit teacher strike of 1974 which demonstrated organized resistance to the accountability tenets of management's bargaining position. What was wrong with accountability? I do not propose an exhaustive analysis but merely suggest that its proponents failed to take account of the lack of consensus about education goals; the negative impacts of a regressive

economy; and the extensive diplomacy, political and instructional requirements of ethnic and minority students. Most of all, however, accountability has failed because some individuals who raised the banner were not as much interested in the education of students as in teaching the professional educator a lesson.

Perhaps accountability contained too much liberal optimism and accordingly placed too much faith in the viability of our educational institutions. To some extent, we may wish to blame the delivery system for some shortcomings. The charges against education were presented in such a fashion that they evoked a sense of guilt rather than a sense of challenge or desire for professional growth. The proponents of accountability expected the bureaucracy to correct itself--to deny its own assumptions and completely change its own character! My experience over the last five years has led me to be very pessimistic about an accountability approach that depends on collective action and bureaucratic decision-making. And I suggest that in order to achieve any positive outcomes of accountability, we must probe much deeper into human motivation for a foundation of understanding and action. Experience suggests that accountability is not very effective in motivating teachers, administrators or others to be committed or to be "professional." In fact, accountability models do not really deal with individual motivation, and they assume that the individual has a sufficient level of energy, commitment and competence for implementing its tenets.

Contrary to this assumption, the accountability model has not succeeded when it has been applied with the goal of changing professionals. This suggests that accountability cannot be used to compensate for professional failure. It cannot be used to convert an incompetent, disinterested or emotionally troubled professional. If this is true, then accountability is not going to "save" our institutions, and it is not an appropriate conversion technique. Accountability requires too much personal expertise and commitment to be externally supervised and controlled on a daily basis. If employees' daily behavior is not "self-starting," then perhaps other issues should be considered. Job termination, re-tooling, and lateral transfers are possible solutions, but accountability cannot bolster professional failures. If supervisors have to constantly monitor daily

practice and decision-making, they are compensating for an employee and an unhealthy dependency relationship exists. In order to work, accountability has to be a non-coercive, self-chosen activity.

Are you accountable? This is apparently an innocent question but can be self-defeating in its implications. It implies that I make it my business to go about asking everyone if they are accountable rather than focusing on my own behavior. This perpetual questioning may suggest an unwillingness to assess our own power and professional self-control. Professional self-control is basic but also terrifying because it forces the individual to recognize that the control for our actions is in our own hands. People who spend 90 percent of their time discussing the misuse of power by others, may be neglecting their own power, self-discipline and personal resources. Something must be done about this dilemma because it is educational and professional suicide. A classic example of this situation has been the emphasis on teacher accountability in the absence of administrator accountability. Any sensible person would surely admit that we need both. In some situations, administrators forced the issue with the teachers, who were not overly enthusiastic about falling in line with the accountability demands. My answer to the question "Are they accountable?" is "Yes, and so am I." In fact, so are students, parents, School Boards, teachers and administrators. Each group has its distinctive areas of responsibility and authority that provide a framework for accountability. This discovery is only a preface to the individual's involvement in accountability--involvement which results in personal commitment. It is an expression of an individual who declares that his or her role must be focused and that some educational matters are more important than others. It is an expression of a refined sense of educational purpose and role, a detailed and deliberate coordination with other professionals, and a willingness to systematically alter one's role and services according to self-evaluations and the evaluations of others. Such a degree of role specialization, coordination and program development is a giant step forward for a profession which has traditionally been absorbed with the breadth of its social responsibilities and accordingly been diverted from the specialized but essential aspects of education. But what are the

indicators of this specialized set of professional behaviors? I have maintained that accountability emerges from a deep personal concern, commitment and competence of the individual who assumes an educational role. You may ask at this point, how a Board of Education can deal with such a complicated level of personal motivation when there is such an expanse of educational need and an overwhelming number of organizational crises to be met and overcome. I would like to suggest a not altogether obvious way for School Boards to deal with their accountability -- by focusing on the person and leadership requirements for professional accountability. Thus, the School Board is accountable for selecting and evaluating a Superintendent on the basis of demonstrated competencies. Let me repeat. The School Board is accountable for selecting and evaluating a Superintendent on the basis of demonstrated competencies.

There may be other areas of School Board accountability but surely this is the most important. And as I think about this area, it seems to suggest the humorous possibility that if the Board maintains a contractual relationship with the right individual, it may be able to delegate the remaining areas of accountability.

Selection and Review of the Superintendent

These views about Board accountability for the selection of the Superintendent are based, at least in part, on my experience and my husband's experience in working with administrators both in Michigan and in other states. The number of talented administrators available to the public schools is increasing. Granted, the complexity of problems in the public schools is also increasing. I do believe, however, that if I were a parent in your school district, I would hold you accountable for selecting a good Superintendent because the talent is available.

When I say that the talent is available, that does not mean that the Board will not have to perform an extensive search. Professional experience and number of degrees may still be a consideration for the position, but they can no longer be the sole determinants. Without elaborating on this theme, I will offer an example: At one time the business manager in a

district would always have been an ex-principal who had a flare for organization and paper work. He had to be an experienced educator so he could "understand educators." Now, at least in my area of the country, the requirements of the position, such as the investment of idle funds, demand that the individual have training and experience in the business world.

Besides selecting a Superintendent, Board members are accountable for periodically reviewing the executive's performance. I do not mean that they conduct reviews only at contractual time or when the district has serious problems. The review is conducted periodically, preferably on an annual basis. This review, from my point of view, should be in two major areas and should be clearly spelled out ahead of time. In other words, the criteria for the review should be known prior to the period of performance, and the review should be based solely on those criteria. What are the areas to be reviewed? The first major one is the Superintendent's organizational capabilities. The following indicators are specific behaviors which the School Board can identify as desirable (the list is not exhaustive):

1. The Superintendent or candidate has a clear understanding of his or her role requirements and accepts responsibility for consulting with others about these role requirements;
2. The Superintendent has a clear understanding of the roles of teachers and other administrators and accepts responsibility for consulting with the professional staff about their role requirements;
3. The Superintendent has a clear understanding of his advisory role for classroom and building programs and accepts responsibility for consulting with the professional staff about those roles;
4. The Superintendent evaluates his or her own professional behavior and effectiveness in the role:
   a. Keeps adequate records of programs and decisions;
   b. Reviews objectives and decisions according to workability and consistency with the work of other professionals;
   c. Uses self-evaluations to make changes in personal behavior and decision-making; and
   d. Uses self-evaluations to make recommendations to other professionals.

5. The Superintendent supports the evaluation of his or her performance by other professionals and lay groups:
   a. Shares program and decision-making information with outside evaluators;
   b. Receives recommendations about his performance from external groups;
   c. Communicates his or her reactions directly to the evaluators of his performance;
   d. Makes changes in his or her behavior and policies according to recommendations of evaluators;
   e. Refers recommendations to other professionals when appropriate.
6. The Superintendent proposes policy changes and initiates new programs according to self-evaluations and external evaluations:
   a. Changes goals, objectives and policies;
   b. Changes activities, methods, materials and other resources;
   c. Alters evaluation programs;
   d. Refines system decision-making;
   e. Formulates specific resources for policy and program initiatives;
   f. Plans goals and resources and activities for program and policy changes.

Evaluation of the Superintendent's Collaborative Efforts

This second area of accountability assumes that the School Board has authority and responsibility for the "energy crisis" in education--the depletion of educational and learning resources. Professional accountability cannot solve the "energy crisis" which we have in education because it is a control process which requires educational fuel in order to operate. Accountability emphasizes efficiency, organizational discipline, communication and cooperation; i.e., it is a rational process for performing a public service. On the other hand, it does not specify the quality of the educational product--it does not delineate educational values and it does not ensure that the primary objective of student learning is realized. Student learning is the fuel which is essential for the operation of the

accountability machinery and it is the crucial factor for understanding the energy crisis of our profession. We have to tap new sources of this energy; we have to make new educational connections; we have to identify new learning opportunities. Unfortunately, in the past, we have looked only to our resources in the profession for leadership. We have assumed that we know the answers to the educational questions. I believe that our educational expertise has led us into a bureaucratic jungle of professional narcisism and isolation. In the despair of our isolation, professionals have been known to exclaim that "we have met the enemy and they is us." The media does not overlook the consequences of our bureaucratic bungling, and we can probably cite many conflicts which have halted student learning. Although many arguments can be advanced in favor of collective bargaining, it offers example of confrontations in which power relationships have become disturbed; educational values have been obscured; and learning opportunities have evaporated. But there is evidence not only in concrete cases. As a general rule, consumers no longer take for granted that education is good for them. I wonder how many public school districts would dare advertise their product with the same degree of confidence that American Airlines proudly announces: "We're American Airlines doing what we do best."

I contend that we can regain our sense of educational mission only by directly collaborating with our clients: students, parents and interested community members. A bleak picture must be painted when you analyze the extent to which accountability has enabled genuine collaboration to occur among educators and lay persons. Certainly, there are few examples of collaboration that have produced demonstrable improvement in student learning. The collaborative role requires the educator to discard the "robes of office" and to step outside the context of expert behavior. The educator cannot relate to the lay person in a superior/subordinate fashion. In a successful collaborative effort, the educator does not seek status by judging the merit or worth of the lay person's ideas. To the contrary, the successful collaborator values the production of ideas about education and learning rather than evaluating them. The emphasis is not on a power contest but on the experience of improving learning.

Collaboration requires the educator to accept the notion that he or she does not have all the answers; to actively question and listen to partners; and finally, to maintain silence so that others may be heard. Collaboration de-emphasizes some typical professional behaviors which may be bureaucratic, task-oriented or knowledge-centered. The collaborator has the ability to play with ideas rather than a tendency to exhort others to accept those ideas. These are personal qualities not typically rewarded in a bureaucratic setting. Collaboration does not mean the same thing as "respond to your clients." It means that educators and lay persons must discover heretofore unrecognized areas of educational and learning interests. The collaborative effort must succeed in developing mutual trust and respect for other points of view and in discovering new areas of common professional and lay interests. Then we can use professional expertise to realize those values through educational policy and action.

If a relationship of mutual trust and appreciation does not develop between the lay person and the professional, the entire process is a loss and no accountability effort, regardless of its technical sophistication, is going to save the day. Competitiveness, isolation and open hostility are often symptoms of a power struggle rather than an effort to build trust. A professional who is insecure in his or her own power relationships and who must be constantly reinforced and reassured about personal status is a leadership liability. Such individuals are unlikely candidates as successful collaborators with those critical interest groups who can discover new sources of educational energy and vitality. The professional who is insecure in his or her personal sense of power fears abandoning the reward system of the bureaucracy and is obsessed with the desire to control the outcome of every decision or to constantly demonstrate educational expertise. Although we may respect and understand an individual's needs to resolve and work through these personal fears and anxieties, we can no longer allow such individuals to direct the efforts of school systems. And this point brings me to my second set of practical implications for Boards of Education. Boards have authority and responsibility for periodic review of Superintendents according to the collaborative criterion which I have just described. Superintendents should be able to use collaboration with diverse groups,

lay and professional, to introduce new educational and learning priorities.

My husband and I have been periodically involved with school systems in assisting them to define their decision-making practices. Usually we involve the Board, the administrators, the teachers, and students who meet both separately and together in defining precisely who makes what decisions. But we not only try to specify (and print) who makes the decisions, we also specify the collaboration that is to take place prior to the formulation of the decisions. It has been our experience that this collaboration among groups eliminates many of the problems which are unrelated to education--and it increases the individuals' commitment to their own accountability.

What indicators can be used as evidence that the Superintendent has this competency? The following list is intended to be suggestive and not inclusive or necessary.

1. The Superintendent or candidate has engaged in collaborative efforts with community groups and tangible improvements in student learning have been based on that collaboration;
2. The Superintendent or candidate consults with teachers or principals who are formulating instructional objectives;
3. The Superintendent consults with students who are engaged in educational projects;
4. Students, teachers, lay persons or other administrators evaluate the Superintendent or candidate as an effective instructional leader of external interest groups;
5. The Superintendent or candidate has developed position papers which specifically present his views on student learning and practical opportunities for growth and development in instructional programs; these views consider various points of view in the community which is served;
6. The Superintendent or candidate identifies lay individuals who may be resources for student learning and establishes working relationships with those individuals;
7. The Superintendent or candidate introduces policy proposals to the Board which document collaboration with lay persons and directly provide for student learning opportunities;
8. The Superintendent or candidate demonstrates interest in collaboration by entering into joint discussions with Board members, teachers, and staff which focus on collaborative roles of those individuals.

Summary and Conclusions

The last decade of educational accountability has not ushered in a millennium of professional optimism or achievement. In fact, we can only make modest claims for the understandings which have been achieved and for the practical action which has been taken in school districts. The negative outcomes have been professional defensiveness and apathy toward system-wide efforts to make the schools more businesslike. Positive outcomes are an understanding of the professional self-discipline required in an organizational setting and a desire to enter into educational collaboration with our constituencies. The case has been made for School Board accountability which capitalizes on these two gains. First, the School Board is accountable for the selection and evaluation of the Superintendent on the individual's demonstrated competencies. Secondly, the School Board is accountable for reviewing the Superintendent in efforts to collaborate with external publics on matters of educational and instructional improvements. There are specific behaviors and acts which can be documented and discovered in the search for the school executive and in the periodic review of that individual. The School Board's accountability is dependent on several factors:

1. A clear identification by Board members of those competencies and achievements which will be documented and used in making the selection and evaluation decisions.
2. Communication of these desired competencies and achievements to the candidates or Superintendent prior to their participation in the selection process or the evaluation.
3. Communication of these standards as Board expectations for the performance of the successful candidate in the role of Superintendent.
4. Board willingness to consistently use these criteria in decision-making and to ensure that they will not be compromised by political or personal considerations.

The use of the accountability and collaboration criteria implies that the Board will make negative as well as positive decisions and will resist the "old boy network " and political favoritism.